

New section of Del. 1 set for peek Sunday

11-mile stretch is from canal to Odessa

By **CHIP GUY**
Staff reporter

The state Department of Transportation will open portions of the new Del. 1 to traffic Sunday — pedestrian and bicycle traffic, that is.

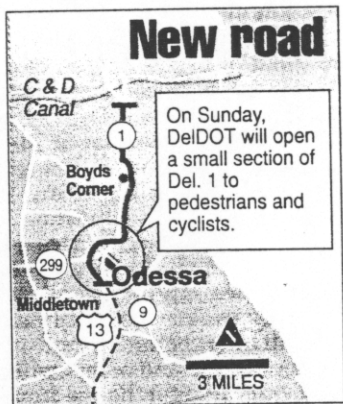
DelDOT this weekend is giving area residents a sneak peek of the limited-access highway, which will open to vehicles in phases in October and November.

Called "Free Ride," the event on the future toll road will be noon to 3 p.m. Sunday, entering at the Del. 299 interchange.

DelDOT is sponsoring the tour along with the Governor's Bicycle Council.

"It's obvious that there is a desire or an interest to be on a new roadway before it opens," DelDOT spokeswoman Michele Ackles said. "What we're doing as we complete each major segment of the highway is giving people a chance to be on it before the cars get on it."

This latest section of Del. 1 is 11 miles, from the Chesapeake & Delaware Canal to just south of Odessa.



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A final link will connect it to the Smyrna-Dover bypass in 2003.

Walkers, bicycling enthusiasts, in-line skaters and the curious are invited to traverse about four miles of the highway, from the Appoquinimink River north to Drawyer Creek.

Transportation officials expect 1,000 people to turn out.

Similar events were held before the Smyrna-Dover link opened, and when the new bridge over the canal was

completed, Ackles said. Those drew 800 to 1,500 people, she said.

Jackie Graham, 48, of Sharmdale in Middletown might be among the curious checking out the \$98 million road this weekend.

"It'll give me something to do on a Sunday," Graham said Thursday, pausing from her walking routine. "... I think I might just do that."

Graham said she is interested in how the new highway looks and feels, especially since she will use the road to bypass traffic clogs in Odessa and at Boyd's Corner on her way to work.

"I'll be so glad when it opens," said Graham, who works at the General Motors plant off Boxwood Road, near Newport.

Officials are asking those who plan to take the tour to park at Middletown High School. A bus will ferry walkers to and from the Del. 299 interchange.

Bicyclists 12 and older are asked to ride to the interchange from the school. The shoulder along Del. 299 will be cordoned off to separate cyclists from vehicular traffic.

People with younger children or those with disabilities will be allowed to park near the interchange at a new Park & Ride facility. Portable bathrooms and water will be available Sunday, Ackles said.

Odessa Councilman Jerry Unruh, who said he has wanted a bypass for the historic town the last 30 years, said he's anxious to look over the new route.

"Some of us around here have talked over the years of wanting to be around when this was done," Unruh, 73, said. "I'm going to get out there and enjoy it as soon as I can."